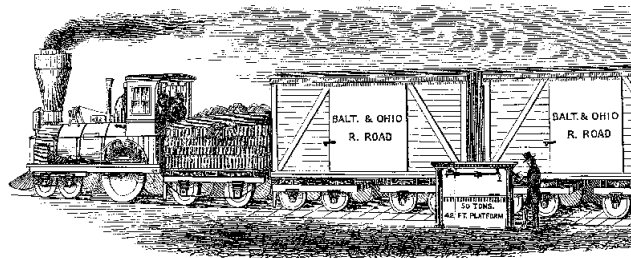


AMERICA'S TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD



CFE 3207V

OPEN CAPTIONED
BARR MEDIA GROUP

1994

Grade Levels: 7-12

27 minutes

1 Instructional Graphic Enclosed

DESCRIPTION

America was once considered so vast that it could never be crossed. But on May 10, 1869, that idea vanished when the last spike in the transcontinental railroad was driven in at Promontory, Utah. Uses vintage photos and reenactments to tell the story of Congressional debates, the planners and builders, and the problems overcome. Its impact changed the face of America and the West.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

- To depict the challenges and obstacles of building the transcontinental railroad.
- To identify events leading up to the mid-1800s when politicians saw a need to build a railroad.
- To recognize the various people who were instrumental in building the railroad.
- To explain the impact of the railroad on the development of America's western lands.
- To illustrate that while the railroad opened up the West for the United States, it destroyed a way of life for the Plains Indians.

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Preview the video to determine unfamiliar vocabulary and language concepts.
2. Note that information will be presented in a variety of ways: vintage photos and paintings, narration, and reenactments.
3. On a map of North America, identify the existing, unexplored land between Missouri and the Pacific Ocean. Compare the settled land with that which was unexplored.
4. Review how people traveled across the country at that time, the amount of time it took, and the dangers they faced.

DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause after the segment on Lewis and Clark. Quickly review their expedition and accomplishments.
3. Pause after the segment on senators and the Civil War.
 - a. Discuss possible motives of senators suddenly supporting the building of a transcontinental railroad.
 - b. Identify how the Civil War affected the building of the railroad.
4. Pause after the segment in which Strobridge refuses to hire the Chinese. Examine possible reasons for his resistance and racial prejudice.
5. Pause after the segment on Indian harassment. Discuss possible reasons for their hostility.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Contrast the reports that Lewis and Clark and Major Stephen H. Long gave to their superiors after their expeditions.
 - a. Evaluate the effect their reports had on westward migration.
 - b. Define The *Great American Desert* according to Long.
2. List reasons immigrants from Europe became disenchanted with life in the cities and why they dreamed of moving West.
3. Describe why better transportation was necessary before the West could be settled successfully.
4. Discuss why settlers on wagon trains passed up good land along the way to California.
5. Identify the Big Four and what their roles were with the Central Pacific Railroad.

6. Describe the reasons Crocker believed the Chinese would be good railroad workers on the Central Pacific.

7. Identify problems that John Casement, field boss of the Union Pacific, faced on The Plains during the spring of 1866. Include supplies, weather, and Indian harassment.

8. Discuss the problems which crews of the Central Pacific faced in the Sierra Nevada Mountains at that time.

9. Describe how the building of the transcontinental railroad affected the founding of Laramie, Wyoming.

10. Describe why the meeting place of the two railroad tracks was so far west, even though the western part of the railroad was begun two years earlier.

11. Explain how the East and West “heard” the last spike being pounded into the rail.

12. Discuss how and why the transcontinental railroad put an end to wagon trains and stagecoach service.

13. Outline the first few trips made on the transcontinental railroad during that first month of service.

14. Describe the devastating effect the transcontinental railroad had on the Plains Indians’ way of life.

Applications and Activities

1. Practice new vocabulary using all modes of communication.

2. Create a large classroom map of the country as it appeared in 1850.

a. Draw the route of the Union Pacific in red.

Attach labels describing milestones and important points to the map.

b. Draw the route of the Central Pacific in blue.

Attach labels describing important milestones to the map.

c. Highlight in black the point where the railroads joined. Attach a label with descriptive information to the map.

3. Trace the wagon trails, pony express routes, and cattle trails on a map of the United States. Compare these to those followed by the transcontinental railroad.

4. Research and report on the explorations of the West which occurred after 1800.

5. Research the Pacific Railroad Act which President Lincoln signed. List major provisions of this law.

6. Research members of the Big Four.

a. Write resumés for each member.

b. Interview members to determine qualifications for their positions as planners of the Central Pacific Railroad.

7. Imagine being a Plains Indian. Keep a journal of events witnessed and personal feelings at seeing the effects of the railroad on The Plains way of life.

8. Research the concept of *Manifest Destiny*. Contrast the emigrants' viewpoint of it with that of the Native Americans'.

9. Research the kinds and sources of materials which were needed to make the railroad, and present in chart form.

10. Research how the Chinese workers were used and how they were treated in comparison to other workers.

11. Design an advertisement that the transcontinental railroad might distribute to promote travel to the West.

12. Write diary entries for a trip through the West on the railroad. Include:

a. Sights noted along the way.

b. What refreshments were served and how they were procured.

c. Who the other passengers were.

13. Visit a virtual museum on the Internet which features railroad, pioneer, or Western artifacts.

14. Practice using Morse code to send information related to the transcontinental railroad. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHICS.)

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. Research appropriate signs for the new terms mentioned in the video.
2. Find an old song or poem from the early railroad days. Present it in American Sign Language.

INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHICS

One instructional graphic is included with this lesson guide. It may be enlarged and used to create transparencies or copies.

- MORSE CODE

WEBSITES

Explore the Internet to discover sites related to this topic. Check the CFV website for related information (<http://www.cfv.org>).

SUMMARY

A century and a half ago, America was considered so vast and the terrain so rugged that it could never be crossed. But a few courageous men with vision decided this great wilderness could be tamed. Men waged war against nature and time. They witnessed a conflict between two great armies--the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific Railroads, but eventually drove a single golden spike and completed the transcontinental railroad.

This most significant date in American history was May 10, 1869, at Promontory, Utah, where the East and West were joined by steel. Few could have imagined what backbreaking work it took to build the first transcontinental railroad.

There were many events leading up to the need for the railroad. By 1800, there were miles and miles of settled farms and towns in the East. But the West was viewed as a land of hidden mystery. In 1803, Lewis and Clark discovered a land rich in promise. But in 1820, Major Stephen H. Long, an army engineer, led

another expedition and reported that the West was hot, dry, and dangerous.

By 1800, immigrants from Europe had filled eastern cities and yearned for open spaces. Many headed West with their belongings packed into prairie schooners on long, arduous journeys.

By the 1850s, it became obvious that the West needed transportation. Politicians seized the opportunity to support the building of a railroad. But the political battle wasn't an easy one, as senators argued whether the railroad should take a southern route or be located in the north. It quickly became embroiled in an issue of the North versus the South as the Civil War approached.

After President Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act, four California merchants, Collis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins, known as the Big Four, chartered the Central Pacific to follow a route east through the Sierras.

Initially, the work was easy as they laid track across The Plains. As they neared the Sierra Nevada mountains, problems arose. Workers were lured away from the railroad with dreams of gold in nearby mountains. So by 1865, seven thousand eager Orientals were clearing land for the Central Pacific. The new crews forged ahead, tunneling through the sheer granite of the mountains.

Meanwhile, on the prairie, Union Pacific crews were laying a mile of track a day. However, their problems were staggering. Supply problems, intense summer heat, driving winter blizzards, and Indian harassment challenged the men. In spite of the obstacles, they finally reached Wyoming by mid-November and in April of 1868, founded Laramie.

By this time, the Central Pacific had crossed the treacherous Sierras and were laying 350 miles of track across the Nevada desert.

On May 10, the two halves of the nation were about to be joined. Union Pacific rails approached

from the north, but stopped short of the Central Pacific. A telegraph was set up trackside with a wire attached to a sledgehammer, and another to a spike so that the final blows could be heard nationwide.

After the spike was driven, the word “done” was tapped out. Crowds of people celebrated the joining of the two rails. That same day, the first transcontinental train rumbled across the arid slopes of Promontory.

While the railroad carried a dream for some, it helped destroy a way of life for others. Hunters rode the trains to hunt and decimated the great buffalo herds of the West. With the disappearance of the herds, the Plains Indians’ way of life also disappeared.

For decades, railroading would dominate the American imagination. In the span of one man’s lifetime, railroads built the United States into a world power.